

Letter 076
Isleworth, October 7 1876

Dear Theo,

It is Saturday again and I write once more. How I long to see you again, Oh! my longing is sometimes so strong. Write soon, a little word as to how you are. Last Wednesday we took a long walk to a village an hour's distance from here. The road led through meadows and fields, along hedges of hawthorn, full of blackberries and clematis, and here and there a large elm tree. It was so beautiful when the sun set behind the grey clouds, and the shadows were long. By chance we met the school of Mr. Stokes, where there are still several of the boys I knew. The clouds retained their red hue long after the sun had set and the dusk had settled over the fields, and we saw in the distance the lamps lit in the village. While I was writing to you, I was called to Mr. Jones, who asked if I would walk to London to collect some money for him. And when I came home in the evening, hurrah, there was a letter from Father with tidings about you. How I should like to be with you both, my boy. And thank God there is some improvement, though you are still weak. And you will be longing to see Mother, and now that I hear that you are going home with her, I think of the words of Conscience:

"I have been ill, my mind was tired, my soul disillusioned and my body suffering. I whom God has endowed at least with moral energy and a strong instinct of affection, I fell in the abyss of the most bitter discouragement and I felt with horror how a deadly poison penetrated my stifled heart. I spent three months on the moors, you know that beautiful region where the soul retires within itself and enjoys a delicious rest, where everything breathes calm and peace; where the soul in presence of God's immaculate creation throws off the yoke of conventions, forgets society, and loosens its bonds, with the strength of renewed youth; where each thought takes the form of prayer, where everything that is not in harmony with fresh and free nature quits the heart. Oh, there the tired souls find rest, there the exhausted man regains his youthful strength. So I passed my days of illness . . . And then the evening! To be seated before the big fireplace with one's feet in the ashes, one's eyes fixed on a star that sends its ray through the opening in the chimney as if to call me, or absorbed in vague dreams too much to look at the fire, to see the flames rise, flicker, and supplant one another as if desirous to lick the kettle with their tongues of fire, and to think that such is human life: to be born, to work, to love, to grow and to disappear."

Mr. Jones has promised me that I shall not have to teach so much in future, but that I may work in his parish, visiting the people, talking with them, etc. May God give His blessing to me.

Now I am going to tell you about my walk to London. I left here at twelve o'clock in the morning and reached my destination between five and six. When I came into that part of the town where most of the picture galleries are, around the Strand, I met many acquaintances: it was dinnertime, so many were in the street, leaving the office or going back there. First I met a young clergyman who once preached here, and with whom I then became acquainted, and then the employee of Mr. Wallis, and then one of the Messrs. Wallis himself, whom I used to visit now and then at his house, now he has two children; then I met Mr. Reid and Mr. Richardson,¹ who are already old friends. Last year about this time Mr. Richardson was in Paris and we walked together to Père Lachaise.

After that I went to van Wisselingh, where I saw sketches for two church windows. In the middle of one window stands the portrait of a middle-aged lady, oh, such a noble face, with the words "Thy will be done," over it, and in the other window the portrait of her daughter, with the words, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."² There, and in the gallery of Messrs. Goupil & Co., I saw beautiful pictures and drawings. It is such an intense delight to be so often reminded of Holland by art. In the City I went to see Mr. Gladwell and to St. Paul's Church. And from the City to the other end of London, where I visited a boy who had left the school of Mr. Stokes because of illness and I found him quite well, playing in the street. Then to the place where I had to collect the money for Mr. Jones. The suburbs of London have a peculiar charm, between the little houses and gardens are open spots covered with grass and generally with a church or school or workhouse in the middle between the trees and shrubs, and it can be so beautiful there, when the sun is setting red in the thin evening mist.

Yesterday evening it was so, and afterwards I wished you could have seen those London streets when the twilight began to fall and the lamps were lit, and everybody went home; everything showed that it was Saturday night and in all that bustle there was peace, one felt the need of and the excitement at the approaching Sunday. Oh, those Sundays and all that is done and accomplished on those Sundays, it is such a comfort for those poor districts and crowded streets.

In the City it was dark, but it was a beautiful walk along the row of churches one has to pass. Near the Strand I took a bus that took me quite a long way, it was already pretty late. I passed the little church of Mr.

Jones and saw in the distance another one, where at that hour a light was still burning; I entered and found it to be a very beautiful little Catholic church, where a few women were praying. Then I came to that dark park about which I have written you already and from there I saw in the distance the lights of Isleworth and the church with the ivy, and the churchyard with the weeping willows beside the Thames.

Tomorrow I shall get for the second time some small salary for my new work, and with it buy a pair of new boots and a new hat. And then, with God's will, I shall go fitted out afresh.

In the London streets they sell scented violets everywhere, they flower here twice a year. I bought some for Mrs. Jones to make her forget the pipe I smoke now and then, especially late in the evening on the playground, but the tobacco here has a touch of gloom about it.

Well, Theo, try to get well soon and read this letter when Mother is sitting with you, because I should like to be with you both in thought. I cannot tell you how glad I am that Mr. Jones has promised to give me work in his parish, so that I shall find by and by what I want. I am longing so much for you. A handshake for yourself and one for Mother when she is sitting beside you. Many regards to the Roos family and to everyone I know, especially to Mr. Tersteeg. Tell Mother it was delightful to put on a pair of socks knitted by her, after that long walk to London.

This morning the sun rose so beautifully again, I see it every morning when I wake the boys, à Dieu.

Your loving brother, Vincent

1. Reid was an English art-dealer; Richardson was the travelling representative for Theo.'s firm.
2. Hebrews XI i.